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ALIEN WORLDS™

NO. 1



**WILLIAMSON
JONES
CONRAD
MAYERIK
REDONDO**

Steve O'Neil
CHIBOC



We have an edge.

It's the same edge that any anthology work in any medium enjoys: no continuity. Now, at the outset that may sound like a drawback and indeed, if it becomes a factor inherent within the individual stories themselves, it certainly can be. But over the long haul of producing issue after issue of a magazine of fiction, not having to deal with continuing characters and or environs has its definite advantages. For one, you don't have to waste a lot of time (and reader's patience) explaining what your protagonists have been up to for the past sixteen issues. And let's face it, even those rare writers who can make continuity captions or dialogue "blend" with the current story are really doing a tap dance for us. Past history info, no matter how cleverly related, is still past history info. Some of us get weary being reminded.

Of course, there's a much greater advantage: you can kill off your hero. If you're like me, there's a very good chance you *will* kill off your hero. But let me emphasize the word *chance*: therein lies not only the secret but the real power of anthology fiction.

Case in point. You're hunkered down in your favorite room in front of the TV of your choice with a newly opened bag of Doritos in your lap, deeply engrossed in the latest re-run episode of *Star Trek*. Captain Kirk has courageously volunteered to detour the planet-gobbling monster away from the *Enterprise* by flying his shuttlecraft down its slimy gullet. If the crew can just fix the transporter console in time, there's a chance they can get Jim out of there before he becomes a living aspirin commercial, but it's gonna be close, folks, it's gonna be close!

Except that we all know, of course, that it isn't going to be close at all. Unless Mr. Shatner's contract is up for negotiation with Paramount, or unless Nimoy's fan mail is of late sizably bigger than his, you can bet ol' Cap Kirk will be back on the bridge next week healthy as a horse and ready to lick any Romulan on the ship.

Trekkies would argue, I suppose, that none of this matters because they've already seen the episode eighty-six times and that the very reason the show is

still in syndication is the joy of watching Kirk, Spock, and the others go through their paces. They would further point out that semi-predictable endings are a small price to pay for all that camaraderie, character development and honey interplay built up over the preceding months.

Okay. But if a writer and an artist are sufficiently skilled to impart enough information (or perhaps *lack* of it if they're really skilled) about a character to sustain reasonable empathy with the reader, then put that character in a situation the outcome of which will greatly effect his longevity... well, friends, then you've got the climate for some real first-rate pulse-pounding. It's not the idea that you *will* kill off your leading character, but that you might, much the same way you or I might step off the curb tomorrow and repave the road with the help of a passing cement truck. Or fall down the cellar stairs. Or wake up and find that the sky has permanently turned maroon and the air smells suspiciously like a summer plutonium storm. In other words, a rather unique form of surprise.

Not that there aren't other, perhaps just as important, reasons for reading anthology fiction, none of which has anything to do with when, or even if, anybody gets killed. Surely it is a singular brand of tale-spinning all its own. I could go on about how de Maupassant made it into art and how Bradbury made it breathe, but I prefer to shut up now and show you how Jones makes it a harmless diversion from the tedium of daily life.

If you agree, or if you feel that life is harmless and the stories are tedious, write and tell us at:

STRATOSPHERIC SCRIBBLINGS

8423 Production Ave.
San Diego, CA 92121-2278

We appreciate your correspondence and support. Heroes abound. Short stories are a rarer, perhaps endangered, species.

Bruce Jones
Editor

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THE FEW AND THE FAR

THE NAME'S COLLINS. PETE COLLINS. THERE ARE SO FEW OF US EARTHLINGS LEFT NOW, AND IT'S A DAWN SHINE, TOO. ONCE WE DOMINATED THE UNIVERSE--THE HIGHEST FORM OF INTELLIGENCE 'NOW WE'VE DWINDLED TO A PRECIOUS FEW, STRUGGLING FOR SURVIVAL AMID ONE INTERGALACTIC WAR AFTER ANOTHER...

OUR NUMBERS ARE SO MINUSCULE, THEY DON'T EVEN ALLOW YOU TO CHOOSE A MATE ANYMORE--THEY ORDER IT. I'D TRAVELED TWELVE MILLION LIGHT YEARS FROM CHASE 6 TO MEET MY NEW BRIDE OUT HERE ON THE EDGE OF ENEMY SPACE. ALL I HAD WAS A PHOTOGRAPH OF HER--WE'D NEVER SPOKEN TWO WORDS OF ENGLISH TO EACH OTHER...I WASN'T EVEN SURE SHE SPOKE ENGLISH!

BUT IF I DIDN'T SHAKE THIS VILIPER SHIP THAT HAD BEEN ON MY TAIL FOR THE LAST THREE DAYS, MY FIANCÉE'S PHOTOGRAPH MIGHT BE ALL I'D EVER SEE!

I'D LET THE ALIEN SHIP STAY BACK THERE BECAUSE UNTIL THIS MORNING I FIGURED IT WAS JUST ANOTHER ROUTINE ESCORT. WE EARTHLINGS WERE USED TO IT. WE RACE THEM THEY OKE US. ACTUAL WARFARE IN THIS SECTOR WAS RARE...

Al Williamson

...SOMEBODY FORGOT TO TELL
THIS CHARACTER!



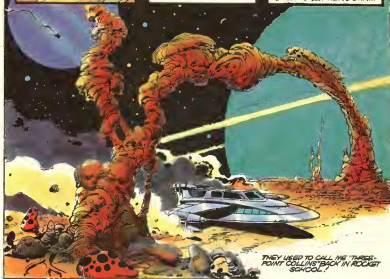
I WAS HIT BAD,
BUT I'VE BEEN HIT
WORSE. THERE WAS
PLENTY OF FUEL TO
GET ME TO THAT
LITTLE ROCKPILE
BELOW. I SWUNG
ABOUT AND PARTED
TOWARD IT...



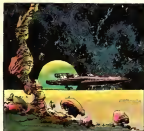
...BUT NOT BEFORE I GOT
OFF A PARTING SHOT!



THAT'S ONE VIBRANT CRAFT THAT
WON'T BE STARTING ANY MORE
HARR! I GODDED MY CRUISER
DOWN AND LOOKED FOR A FLAT
PLACE TO GET HER DOWN...



THEY USED TO CALL ME "THREE-
POINT COLLINS" BACK IN ROCKET
SCHOOL!



I DIALED A DAMAGE REPORT NOT AS BAD AS I THOUGHT. THE SERVICE-ROBS WOULD HAVE IT FIXED IN A FEW DAYS...

NOTHING TO DO BUT SIT AND WAIT. I PULLED THE PHOTO OF MY PRINCE FROM MY SUIT AND GAZED AT THE PRETTY FACE...



THAT'S WHEN I HEARD THE NOISE OUTSIDE...



GOOD THING I'D LEFT MY SUIT ON! I GRABBED A LASER PISTOL AND JUMPED DOWN FROM THE HATCH...



MY SUIT SENSORS SHOWED THE PILOT WAS STILL BREATHING BUT NOT IN ANY CONDITION TO PUT UP A FIGHT. I APPROACHED CAUTIOUSLY...



I TWISTED OFF THE HELMET AND NEARLY DROPPED MY TIEH!



I'D SEEN A LOT OF BODIES IN THE GALAXY, BUT NEVER ONE LIKE THIS... I GOT HER OUT OF THE DAMAGED SUIT AND MERT TO A WARM FIRE. I STOOD THERE STARRING DOWN IN AWE... SHE WAS AWAKE, BUT NOT TALKING...



ONE THING YOU LEARN EARLY ON IN THIS LIFE IS NOT TO TRUST MANY OF THE ALIENS IN THIS QUADRANT HAD PERFECTED THE MYRHO-SCREEN. NOW DID I KNOW IF WHAT I LOOKED AT WAS WHAT I SAW...!



SHE MIGHT BE PROJECTING A FALSE IMAGE TO PUT ME OFF GOING. CERTAIN AGENCIES PAID WELL FOR A DEAD EARTHLING. HOW DID I KNOW SHE WASN'T A BOUNTY HUNTER?



NU OPA ZU ULA?

JUST SIT TIGHT AND NO ONE GETS HURT.



KALA MAKLA LE?

SORRY SISTER, NO COMPRENDO...

SHE HAD TO SLEEP SOONER OR LATER YOU CAN'T HOLD ANYHO-TRANCE WHEN YOU'RE ASLEEP, AND THE FIRE WAS MAKING HER WEARY...



FINALLY, IT HAPPENED...

SHE'S DOZED OFF!...



AND JUST WHAT I SUSPECTED OCCURRED...

SHE'S CHANGED INTO HER TRUE FORM!

OR WAS IT HER TRUE FORM?

MAYBE SHE'S STILL FOOLING ME / TRYING TO GET THE DROP ON ME
BOMESHOW! MAYBE THIS IS JUST
ANOTHER HYPNO-SCREEN
PROJECTION--
MAYBE SHE'S
NOT ASLEEP
AT ALL!



THERE'S ONE SURE WAY TO
TELL... EXCEPT THAT THE
CAT PEOPLE ARE SUPPOSED
TO BE ALLIES OF EARTH-
LINGS... WHAT WOULD HAPPEN
IF I KILLED AN ALLY?



I SAT BACK DOWN TRYING TO SORT THIS
THING OUT. I NEEDED HELP, ADVICE, SOME-
ONE FAMILIAR WITH THIS TERRITORY. I
PULLED OUT THE PICTURE OF MY FIANCEE
AGAIN, STARING AT IT WISTFULLY...



I WAS RIGHT! SHE WAS PROOVING ME! IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE!
SOMEWHERE IN THAT FLimsY OUTLET, SHE'D MANAGED TO CONCEAL
A LASER PISTOL OF HER OWN!



SHE WAS MAKING FOR MY
SHIP-- GOING TO LOOK
ME OUT!! I TOOK
CAREFUL AIM AT
THE CURVACIOUS
FORM...





BUT IT WAS TRUE...I BURIED HER THERE ON THE ROCKY LITTLE PLANET UNDER THE TWINKLING STARS...WONDERING WHEN THE WARS WOULD STOP...WONDERING WHY PEOPLE WOULD TRUST EACH OTHER AGAIN...



MOLOCK WAS LEADER.
MOLOCK WAS LAW.
ALL OBEY MOLOCK...

WHEN HIS LITTLE BAND SPOTTED THE HUGE CAVE BEAR IN THE
VALLEY, IT WAS MOLOCK WHO GAVE THE COMMAND TO ATTACK...
MOLOCK WHO INSTRUCTED THE FIRST SPEAR THRUSTS... MOLOCK
WHO SAT AUTHORITATIVELY ON A NEARBY HILTOP WITH THE
WOMEN AND--AWAY FROM ALL DANGER--WATCHED...



STORY: BRUCE JONES ART: VAL MAYERIK
Colors: Steve Oliff Letters: Carrie McCarthy

BRUCE JONES

VAL MAYERIK

IT WAS NOT THE FIRST CAVE BEAR MOLOCK'S BAND HAD KILLED, BUT IT WAS THE BIGGEST...AND THE QUICKEST. FAR QUICKER THAN SLUGGISH DHONA...



MOLOCK WAS NOT SADDENED DHONA HAD BEEN OBSTINATE LATELY. HE BROKE THE RULES! HE TALKED OF THE BIG TRIBE AND HE USED THE FORBIDDEN WORDS...

THOSE WHO DISOBEYED MOLOCK DESERVED TO DIE: HE WATCHED WITH SATISFACTION AS THE OTHERS BROUGHT DOWN THE BEAR...



ANOTHER DAY. ANOTHER KILLING. ANOTHER NIGHT OF FULL BELLIES!

LIFE WAS GOOD! DHONA WOULD NOT BE MISSED...



DHONA NUZZLED CLOSE AS JAX AND BHEN SLICED UP THE CARCASS. MOLOCK SKINNED DOWN AT HER. DHONA WAS BHEN'S MATE BY CEREMONY...BUT MOLOCK WAS LEADER...



RHENA TURNED AWAY SPITEFULLY. SHE GROUND HER TEETH AND MUTTERED SOMETHING UNDER HER BREATH. RHENA WAS MOLOCK'S MATE...BY CEREMONY...



FROM DOWN IN THE VALLEY, BHEN WATCHED MOLOCK COUPLES WITH HIS MATE AND THE VEINS STOOD OUT HOTLY IN HIS NECK...YET HE MOVED NOT AN INCH...MOLOCK WAS LEADER...



THAT NIGHT, MOLOCK LET BHEN HAVE THE FIRST PIECE OF MEAT. BHEN WAS A GOOD HUNTER AND MOLOCK DID NOT WANT TO ANGER HIM OVERMUCH...



AFTERWARD, MOLOCK SLEPT WITH JAN, HIS MATE...

MOLOCK AWOKE EARLY, STRETCHED, AND WATCHED THE STARS PASS FROM THE MORNING SKY. IT HAD BEEN SIX MONTHS SINCE THEY HAD LEFT THE BIG TRIBE...



IT HAD BEEN A DARING MOVE FOR MOLOCK. THE TRIBE HAD CALLED HIM BY ANOTHER NAME THEN, BUT ONCE FREE OF THEM AND THEIR STUPID LAWS, HE HAD NAMED HIMSELF MOLOCK THE MIGHTY!



AT FIRST THE OTHERS HAD BEEN EXCITED ABOUT LEAVING THE TRIBE GOING OFF TO THIS UNEXPLORED VALLEY WITH MOLOCK, BUT SOON THEY HAD GROWN FEARFUL, THEN COWARDLY, BEGGING HIM TO RETURN THEM. MOLOCK HAD HAD TO USE DISCIPLINE...



THEY LEARNED WHO WAS LEADER SOON ENOUGH. THEY LEARNED TO OBEY THE RULES AND NOT TO USE THE FORBIDDEN WORDS...

TODAY THEY WOULD PICK BERRIES NEAR THE FORBIDDEN ZONE, AND THAT MADE MOLOCK NERVOUS STILL, THE BERRIES WERE THE BIGGEST AND THE SWEETEST HERE...



MOLOCK HAD BEEN TALKING CASUALLY WITH BHEN'S MATE WHEN HE NOTICED THAT JAN WAS NO LONGER WITH THE GROUP...





IT TOOK ONLY MINUTES TO FIND HIM! AS MOLOCK HAD SUSPECTED, JAX HAD WANDERED INTO THE FORBIDDEN ZONE...



JAX HAD BROKEN ONE OF THE RULES...JAX MUST BE PUNISHED...



KENAT? KENA WANGUT?

RULES MUST BE OBEYED... WITHOUT RULES THERE IS NO LEADERSHIP... MOLOCK WAS LEADER... MOLOCK WAS LAW...



JAX AND THE OTHERS HAD BEEN TOLD MANY TIMES NOT TO GO NEAR THE FORBIDDEN ZONE...THE FORBIDDEN ZONE WAS EVIL, IT WOULD ONLY BRING HARM TO THE BAND...MOLOCK WAS LAW...MOLOCK WAS WISE...



AND THEY SEEMED TO BE SHOUTING AT HIM, PUSHING AT HIM, ORDERING HIM ABOUT, CONSTRICTING HIM, CRUSHING HIM, UNTIL HE CANNOT BREATHE, CANNOT THINK!



A SUDDEN PIERCING SCREAM FROM THE BERRY PATCH BREAKS HIS REVERIE. MOLOCK LEAPS OVER JAY'S BRUISED AND BROKEN FORM AND RUNS TO HIS BAND...



AS HE BURSTS FROM THE THICKET, HIS HEART FREEZES WITH TERROR...



HERE IS A CREATURE EVEN MIGHTY MOLOCK DARE NOT MEET. HE TURNS WITH THE OTHERS AND THEY SCATTER TO THE HILLS...



LIFE IS GOOD HERE... LIFE IS FREE...

...BUT LIFE IS ALSO SOMETIMES HARD...



IT IS JUST AS WELL... JAY WILL NOT NEED A MATS IN HIS CONDITION NOW ANYWAY...



SUDDENLY LITTLE NHUMA BREAKS DOWN... SHE CRIES AND WAILS AND BEGS MOLOCK TO TAKE THEM BACK TO THE TRIBE...



GOLD SHABA!
GOLD MEGA,
PEZA!!



IN HER EXCITEMENT SHE FORGETS THE RULES AND USES ONE OF THE FORBIDDEN WORDS... MIDLOCK JOGS HER MEMORY...



CHLOA SNUGGLES CLOSER TO HIM, LICKING HIS EAR. STORM CLOUDS ARE GATHERING OVERHEAD: TIME TO GET THE BAND BACK TO THE CAVE...

...SOS... SOS...



LATER THAT NIGHT, CHLOA MAKES MIDLOCK SOME BEER WINE. HE DRINKS MUCH, SLEEPS DEEPLY... BUT AWAKENS BEFORE DAWN... SOMEONE IS MOVING FROM THE CAVE...



HE FOLLOWS THE FOOTPRINTS CLEARLY DEFINED IN THE MORNING DEW... THEY LEAD TO THE FORBIDDEN ZONE...



IT IS CHLOA'S VOICE HE HEARS WITHIN... AND SHE IS USING THE FORBIDDEN WORDS...

"VANGUARD 5 TO EARTH, DO YOU COPY?"



—THAT'S RIGHT, WE'VE BEEN MARDOONED HERE FOR MONTHS! IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A VACATION! MILLER'S GONE BERSERK! THINKS HE'S A CAVE MAN OR SOMETHING! HE'S GOT US ALL DRESSED UP LIKE SAVAGES!



IT IS GOOD HERE. THE AIR IS SWEET. HE IS FREE FROM THE TRIBE AND THEIR STUPID RULES. LIFE IS SIMPLE... CLEAN...



MOLOCK IS LEADER. MOLOCK IS LAW. ALL OBEY MOLOCK...



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HEAD OF THE CLASS

JEREMY HAD ARRIVED AT FERGUSON SCHOOL JUST THAT AFTERNOON. UNLIKE THE OTHER BOYS THERE, HE HAD NEVER BEEN TO AN ORPHANAGE IN OHIO BEFORE. THOUGH FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING, THAT WAS ABOUT THE ONLY PLACE IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM HE HADN'T BEEN SHUNTED TO AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER ...

BUT JEREMY DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO REMINISCE ABOUT GROWING UP IN CHILDHOOD ORPHANAGES. IT WAS DINNER TIME AND MISS FERGUSON WAS ABOUT TO SAY GRACE ...

... AND WHEN MISS FERGUSON SPOKE... YOU REMAINED SILENT ...

... LORD BLESS THIS FOOD TO OUR BODIES AND OUR BODIES TO HIS KEEPING. AMEN.

YOU MAY EAT, CHILDREN.



MISS FERGUSON CHEWED HER FOOD PRIMLY EFFICIENTLY. SHE DIDN'T LOOK UP AT THE BOY SHE ADDRESSED ...

SO, DANIEL... HOW IS THE ALGEBRA COMING ALONG? HM?

... ER, JUST F- FINE. MISS FERGUSON...

SO I'DO TELL LUTHOR INFORMS ME THAT YOU HAVEN'T BEEN STUDYING ENOUGH. ALSO THAT YOU READ COMIC BOOKS IN BED AFTER LIGHTS -OUT WITH A FLASH- LIGHT. HM?

I... I...







STEP-TWO.
STEP-TWO.
STEP-TWO-
THREE...

JUST
A
MOMENT...



WERE
YOU
SLEEPING,
ARTHUR?

N-NO,
MISS
FERGUSON!
I...I...IT'S
JUST
THAT, WELL,
I DIDN'T
GET MUCH
REST LAST
NIGHT...
AFTER...



NAUGHTY, NAUGHTY
CHILD. THE BODY IS
GOD'S TEMPLE. TO
SLEEP THROUGH
EXERCISE IS TO
PROFANE THAT
TEMPLE. LUTHOR!

PLEASE,
I--!!



THIS
PUNISHMENT
IS JUST,
YES,
ARTHUR?

Y- YES,
MISS
FERGUSON...

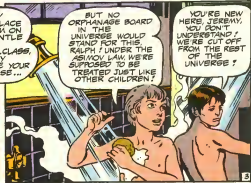
YES. AND
WHY IS IT
JUST?



BECAUSE
YOUR HEART
IS IN THE RIGHT
PLACE --
YAGGGHHH!



VERY
WELL. PLACE
THE ARM ON
THE MANTLE
PLEASE,
LUTHOR. CLASS,
YOU MAY
RESUME YOUR
EXERCISE ...



BUT NO
ORPHANAGE BOARD
IN THE
UNIVERSE WOULD
STAND FOR THIS,
RALPH! UNDER THE
ASIMOV LAW, WE'RE
SUPPOSED TO BE
TREATED JUST LIKE
OTHER CHILDREN!

YOU'RE NEW
HERE, JEREMY,
YOU DON'T
UNDERSTAND!
WE'RE CUT OFF
FROM THE REST
OF THE
UNIVERSE!



THERE'S ONLY TWO OF THEM, RALPH, AND TWENTY OF US! WE COULD--POISON THEM OR SOMETHING! TAKE OVER THE PLACE!



YEAH, WHERE YOU FROM ANYWAY, JEREMY?

WON'T WORK. WE NEED MISS FERGUSON. YOU'RE REALLY NAIVE, JEREMY.



I'M NOT SURE, REALLY. I'VE BEEN IN PLACES LIKE THIS SINCE I CAN REMEMBER. I'M NOT EVEN SURE JEREMY IS MY REAL NAME. THEY NEVER HAVE BEEN ABLE TO FIND MY RECORDS...

WELL, THERE'S NO ESCAPE FROM FERGUSON SCHOOL. JEREMY: YOU MAY AS WELL FACE THAT RIGHT NOW.

HEY, KNOCK IT OFF! I THINK I HEAR HER COMING!



NEXT DAY...

MY JOINTS FEEL CREAKY TODAY, PAUL. YOU WILL RUB SOME OIL ON MY FEET, PLEASE...

YES, MISS FERGUSON.



LUTHOR TELLS ME HE HEARD WHISPERING LAST NIGHT. DO ANY OF YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS? RALPH?

N-NO, MISS FERGUSON! I SWEAR!



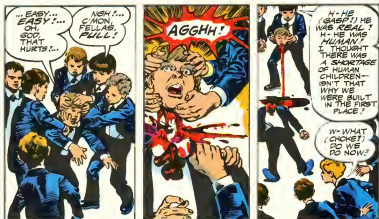
I DON'T APPROVE OF SWEARING, RALPH. LUTHOR HEARD YOUR VOICE, CLEARLY AND DISTINCTLY. DO YOU WISH TO DIFFER? ANSWER FREELY.

I... I... N-NO MISS FERGUSON...



NAUGHTY NAUGHTY CHILD. A THIRD DEGREE DEMERIT I SHOULD THINK, LUTHOR?









PACIFIC COMICS



ON SALE in JANUARY

TALK TO TEDI



THE METEORITE STRUCK AT PRECISELY NOON. EARTH TIME. IT SHEARED AWAY MOST OF THE MAIN STABILIZER AND SENT A WAVE OF NOXIOUS GASSES SWEEPING INTO THE CONSOLE ROOM WHERE JOHN HAGARTY HAD BEEN NAPPING. IF THE RED WARNING LIGHT HADN'T STARTED FLASHING, IF THE DISASTER SIREN HADN'T BEGUN SCREECHING OBEDIENTLY.



BUT THE RED LIGHT HAD FLASHED AND THE SIREN HAD SCREECHED AND JOHN HAGARTY HAD MANAGED TO BOLT FROM HIS SHOCK COUCH AND GRAB UP HIS SPACESUIT AND GET HIS HEAD INTO THE HELMET SECONDS BEFORE THE DEADLY GAS HIT HIM...



HE PUNCHES IN WHAT IS LEFT OF THE COMPUTER AND THE READOUT DOESN'T LOOK GOOD: FUEL IS POURING IN BUCKETS FROM THE RIGHT CARGO AREA, THE SHIP HAS TO BE SHUT DOWN, FAST! BUT, THAT IS ONLY THE BEGINNING...



THE MAIN GYRO IS ON THE FRITZ! IF HE STOPS THE SHIP THERE'S NO GUARANTEE IT WILL EVER START AGAIN, EVEN IF HE ATTEMPTS TO FIX IT! HE TURNS FRANTICALLY TOWARDS THE VIEWPORT...



SHE IS AN INSIGNIFICANT-LOOKING WORLD: SHE DIDN'T EVEN REGISTER ON THE STANDARD CHARTS, BUT SHE IS GREEN AND CLOUD-COVERED, AND SHE LOOKS LIKE A LOT MORE HOSPITABLE PLACE TO BE MAROONED THAN THE INSIDE OF HIS SHIP!



HAGARTY SETS A NEW COURSE, LETS THE BURNING CIRCUITS GO FOR THE MOMENT, AND STRAPS HIMSELF IN...



MAYDAY, MAYDAY... THIS IS PRIVATE CRUISER RJK-4 PILOT JOHN HAGARTY SPEAKING... I'M THREE PAR SECS NORTH OF THE ORION QUADRANT...

SHIP CRIPPLED... WILL ATTEMPT LANDING ON UNREGISTERED PLANET... COORDINATES B-ALA 7 SOUTH AT C-ALPHA 9 NORTH... PLEASE COPY... ANYONE!

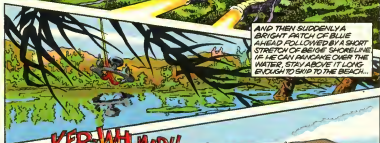
MAYDAY... MAYDAY!



A SPIKE OF PANIC JABS AT HIS HEART--THE CONTROLS ARE SLUGGISH, THE DAMAGE MUST HAVE BEEN MORE EXTENSIVE THAN HE'D FIRST ESTIMATED. IT ISN'T GOING TO BE ONE OF YOUR EVERYDAY SMOOTH-AS-SILK LANDINGS. HE GRIPS THE CONTROLS TIGHTLY... GRIPS HIS TEETH TIGHTER STILL...



TREES. NOTHING BUT TREES AND DENSE FOLIAGE! WELL, IT'S GREEN ALL RIGHT, AT LEAST HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THAT--BUT WHERE TO PUT HER DOWN?...



AND THEN SUDDENLY A BRIGHT PATCH OF BLUE AHEAD FOLLOWED BY A SHORT STRETCH OF BEIGE SHORELINE IF HE CAN RANCAKE OVER THE WATER, STAY ABOVE IT LONG ENOUGH TO SKIP TO THE BEACH...



MINUTES? HOURS? JOHN HAGARTY WILL NEVER KNOW. BUT AT LAST CONSCIOUSNESS RETURNS... AND WITH IT NEW DANGERS... THE FOOD STORAGE UNIT IS COMPLETELY DESTROYED.

(COUGH-COUGH!)



AND HIS SUIT IS LEAKING BADLY-- DAMAGED IN THE CRASH! THE NOXIOUS VAPORS INSIDE THE CRAFT HAVE ENTERED HIS HELMET... HE'LL DIE IN MINUTES UNLESS HE ACTS QUICKLY...

(COUGH-COUGH!)

HE SHUTS DOWN THE GYRO AND FLIPS ON THE CABIN PUMPS.



THEN, FEELING HIS WAY THROUGH THE HAZE, HE FINDS THE TWISTED RENT IN THE BULKHEAD AND STARTS ATTACKING IT WITH AN OXY-TORCH...



THE LITTLE GREEN NEEDLE ON THE CONSOLE BEHIND HIM DROPS BACK INTO THE SAFETY ZONE. HE TAKES A DEEP BREATH... THE CABIN IS CLEAN...

HE STUMBLES TO THE VIEWPORT, GAZING OUT AT THE LUSH LABYRINTH OF VINES AND CREEPERS AND SPIRALING FAUNA.



HE SHRUGS OFF THE SPACESUIT; IT'S RUINED. HE PRAYS THAT THE AIR OUTSIDE IS AS GOOD AS THE AIR INSIDE...

HE TOUCHES A STUD ON THE CONSOLE: ATMOSPHERE READ-OUT.



LIGHTS BLINK. CIRCUITS CLICK. WORDS FLARE INTO RELIEF: HAGARTY HOLDS HIS BREATH...

HIS HEART SINKS. HE TURNS AWAY FROM THE VIEWPORT NUMBLY. POLYDISOLINE, A POISONOUS GAS, THE OUTSIDE AIR IS PERMEATED WITH IT. HE'S TRAPPED INSIDE. TRAPPED! AND THE ROCKET MUST BE REPAIRED FROM OUTSIDE THE SHIP! HE FINGERS THE RUINED MATERIAL OF HIS SPACESUIT... A COLD STONE FORMS IN THE PIT OF HIS STOMACH...



AN HOUR LATER HE IS STILL SITTING THERE STARING SILENTLY. THERE IS NOTHING HE CAN DO BUT SIT AND WAIT. HIS EYES FALL OVER HIS TRAVEL BAG WHICH HAS FALLEN FROM THE DAMAGED STORAGE UNIT.



HE WALKS OVER, PICKS IT UP, UNSNAPS IT...

BOOKS HE'D PICKED
LOTS OF BOOKS FOR
THE LONG BUSINESS
TRIP TO ALTAIR SEVEN.
HE'LL READ A BOOK
NOW, TAKE HIS MIND
OFF THE INEVITABLE.



WHAT TH--

THE CASE SPRINGS OPEN...SOMETHING
DROPS INTO HIS HANDS...

A GUN TUGS AT HAGARTY'S
CHEEK, BOBBY. IT WAS HIS
SON BOBBY WHO DID
THIS. AT HOME, BOBBY
HAD TAKEN OUT HIS
FATHER'S BOOKS WHEN
HAGARTY AND HIS WIFE
WERE ELSEWHERE...



THIS IS TRAVELING TED!
"THE DOLL THAT GOES ANYWHERE"
SPEAK INTO THE MICRO-
PHONE AND TED! WILL
DO ANYTHING YOU ASK!

...AND REPLACED THEM WITH HIS TEDDY
BEAR. IT WAS BOBBY'S TOKEN OF GOOD
LUCK ON THE LONG FLIGHT...

BOBBY'S LITTLE 'TED'. IT BROUGHT
BACK MEMORIES: MEMORIES OF THAT
WONDERFUL WEEKEND ON PHOEBUS WHEN
HE'D FIRST BOUGHT THE DOLL FOR HIS SON...

SURE,
SON. HOW
MUCH?

SIXTY
BUCKS, PLUS
THREE FOR THE
MICROPHONE.



BOBBY HAD BEEN DELIGHTED AND EVEN
HAGARTY AND CINDY HAD BEEN SURPRISED
AT HOW WELL THE LITTLE CONTRAPTION
WORKED...

WATCH, DADDY: WALK, TED!
WALK ACROSS
THE ROOM!



CINDY... BOBBY... HE WOULD
NEVER SEE THEM AGAIN. HE
TOSSES DOWN THE DOLL AND
WALKS OVER TO THE VIEWPORT
AGAIN. JUST OUTSIDE HE SEES
THE BIG FRUIT TREE STANDING
SILENT GUARD BESIDE HIS
SHIP... HIS MOUTH WATERS...
HE'S HUNGRY...

DON'T LOOK AT IT! IT'LL ONLY
MAKE IT WORSE! DO SOME-
THING! OCCUPY YOUR TIME!
MAYBE THAT MESSAGE YOU
SENT GOT THROUGH! MAYBE
THEY'LL PICK YOU UP!

...BOBBY.
CINDY...



HE WANDERS AIMLESSLY ABOUT
THE SHIP... HOURS PASS... HIS
STOMACH GROWLS
LOUDLY... HE TRIES
NOT TO THINK
ABOUT IT. HE
FIDGETS. HE
YAWNS. HE LOOKS
AT THE CLOCK.
HE STRETCHES.
HE PICKS UP
THE LITTLE
MICROPHONE
BOBBY STUCK
IN HIS
BRIEFCASE.

O.K.
TEDDI, DO
YOUR STUFF:
WALK,
TEDDI...



TEDI JERKS ACROSS THE FLOOR WITH A CUTE LITTLE STUMBLING GAIT...

BRAVO / BRAVO / VERY GOOD! YOU'RE TERRIFIC! NOW TRY SOMETHING ELSE: ROLL OVER, TEDDI!



BY GEORGE, HE DID IT! DAMN CLEVER, THESE NEW COMPUTER CHIPS!



OKAY, TED! LET'S SEE YOU STAND ON YOUR HEAD! HEY, HAGARTY! HA-HA! TERRIFIC!

THIS IS A GAG! HA-HA! ENTERTAINMENT WHILE I WAIT TO DIE! TOO BAD I DON'T GET THE EVENING PAPER HERE, I'D HAVE TED! FETCH IT! HA-HA!



'FETCH IT'...THE PHRASE STICKS. A WILD THOUGHT FORMS ABRUPTLY IN HIS MIND. HIS EYES SWEEP BACK TO THE CURVING VIEW-PORT. HIS HEART THUNDERING SUDDENLY IN HIS CHEST...

...TH-THE FRUIT! THE TREE!

MY GOD! COULD IT BE POSSIBLE?...



TEDI, LISTEN TO ME! HALLA, TEDDI! WALK TO THE AIRLOCK! DO AS I SAY!



THE TINY FEET MOVE...THE FRAGILE FORM MARCHES FORWARD, THE BIG EYES STARE BLANKLY AHEAD...



THE AIRLOCK DOOR HISSES OPEN PNEUMATICALLY. TEDDI STEPS INSIDE. HAGARTY PASSES ANOTHER BUTTON ON THE CONSOLE...

I'M OPENING THE OUTER LOCK, TEDDI... CAN YOU HEAR ME? I WANT YOU TO WALK DOWN THE RAMP TO THE GROUND OUTSIDE. HALLA, TEDDI, CAN YOU HEAR ME?...



NAGARTY SWALLOWS. THERE IS A TIGHTNESS IN HIS THROAT. IT WON'T WORK! IT CAN'T WORK. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! THE ATMOSPHERE OUTSIDE WILL ROUL ITS CONTROLS SOMEHOW! THERE IS A MOVEMENT BELOW THE VIEWPORT...



IT'S HIM! HE'S OUTSIDE! IT WORKED!

GO TO THE TREE, TED! THE BIG FRUIT TREE! WALK TO THE TREE! ATTA BOY!



FRUIT'S TOO HIGH FOR HIM TO REACH! ...THE GROUND, TED! LOOK ON THE GROUND AROUND THE TREE. MAYBE SOME FRUIT HAS FALLEN FROM THE BRANCHES.



PICK IT UP! THAT'S IT! GOOD, TED! GOOD!

NOW COME BACK TO THE SHIP! COME BACK!

AND MINUTES LATER...



HA/HA! A LITTLE OVER-RIPE, BUT NOT BAD! AND THE COMPUTER SAYS IT'S EDIBLE! TED, YOU'RE A GENIUS! HA/HA! THE POLL THAT GOES ANYWHERE! I CAN LAST FOR WEEKS LIKE THIS.



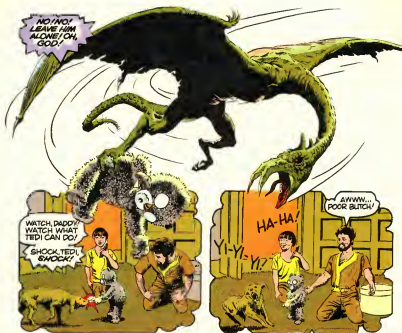
THE DAYS PASS...

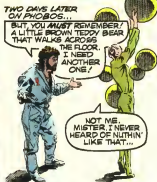
BRING ME ONE OF THE YELLOW ONES THIS TIME, TED!...



TRY SOME OF THE RED BERRIES OVER THE ON THE --

HEY! WHAT'S THAT THING?







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